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THE BELIEF IN REBIRTH OF THE DRUSES AND OTHER SYRIAN SECTS.

BY THEODORE BESTERMAN.

THE great majority, probably three-quarters, of the population of Syria is Moslem, and this proportion would be still greater if the various sects having one degree or other of affiliation to Islām were included among the Moslems. These sects are the Ismailians (Ismā'īliyeh) and Metāwileh, who are Shi'ites, as are the Kurds¹ and Circassians, and the Nusairis (Ansārīyeh) and Druses, who have unmistakable affinities to the Shi'ites. As is well known, the Shi'ites form one of the two divisions of Islām, the other comprising the Sunnites. The main divergence between the Sunnites and the Shi'ites is with regard to the khalifate. The khalifs recognised by the former, from the time of the first Ommayad, are not accepted by the Shi'ites, who expect the broken line of succession to be resumed by a reincarnation of their last Imām.² It would therefore have been natural for the sects formed within Shi'ism or altogether seceding from it, to emphasise this important divergence, and to have developed the doctrine of rebirth into an important element in their beliefs. And this has in fact occurred in most cases. It is the belief in rebirth that forms the connecting link between these different sectarian bodies of doctrine.³

¹ Among the Kurds are a few Yezidis, among whom the belief in rebirth is also found ; but I do not discuss them in the present paper as I hope to deal elsewhere with the Yezidis as a whole.

² Other elements of the belief are found in Islām, but the remark in the previous note applies also to these.

³ George Samné, *La Syrie* (Paris, 1920), p. 326.

The belief appears even to have caught up local folklore elements, and to have spread in this way to the Jews, and no doubt to the Christians also. Thus, Canon Parfit, who has spent many years on the spot, reports that there is "an interesting belief prevalent throughout Syria that the soul of a prophet named El Khudr (*i.e.* The Evergreen One) passed in succession, like the incarnations of Vishnu, into Phinehas, Elijah, and St. George. The Jews speak of him as Elijah, or Phinehas, the Moslems invariably think of him as Elijah; but the Nosairis follow the Christian custom of associating him with St. George. The worship of El Khudr amongst the ignorant people has almost obscured the Nosairi devotion to Ali, who continues to receive due homage, however, from the initiated. The common people make offerings to El Khudr, and they firmly believe the stories of his victory over the dragon and many other reputed exploits of the valiant St. George."⁴ It is interesting to note that on Mount Carmel there is an important place of pilgrimage, visited by both Moslems and Christians, in the shape of a cave called El-Khudhr (or Khadhr) or Elijah's Cave.⁵

Curiously enough the specifically Shi'ite sects have emphasised the belief in rebirth less than those merely influenced by Shi'ism. The Metāwileh, indeed, now few in number and much reduced from their former greatness, have given no evidence of holding it at all. The Ismailians are to-day even fewer in numbers than the Metāwileh; they live in the hills and plains about Homs. The chief form in which they hold the belief is that of divine reincarnation. They hold that the deity incarnated seven successive times. These incarnations are called *nātiq*, speaker or utterer. They were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and

⁴ Rev. J. T. Parfit, *Druzes and the Secret Sects of Syria* (Westminster, 1917), p. 24; *id.*, *Among the Druzes of Lebanon and Bashan* (London, 1917), i., pp. 232-3.

⁵ *A Handbook of Syria* (Admiralty, London, 1920), p. 513.

Mohammed, as the first six, the seventh and last varying with the several branches of the Ismailians. Usually he is considered to have been Ismā'il b. Ja'far or his son Muhammad. After each of the first six *nāṭiqs* came seven *imāms*, or chiefs, in the seventh of whom the next *nāṭiq* was in due course incarnated. Thus, Mohammed was the seventh *imām* of Jesus, and it was not until he had reached the age of forty that he became the sixth *nāṭiq*. As Isma'il b. Ja'far was the seventh *imām* of Mohammed, there should, according to the system, be no doubt that he was the last *nāṭiq*. Each *nāṭiq* was accompanied by an *asās*, foundation, who passed through a series of incarnations similar to the *nāṭiq*. The first six *asās* were Seth, Sem, Ismael, Aaron, Simon-Peter, and 'Ali; as to the seventh there is much difference of opinion.⁶

The Ismailians have also a doctrine of human rebirth. They believe that every man is reborn in successive human bodies until such time as he recognises the *imām* of his time and learns the theological sciences under his direction. The time spent during each incarnation on earth is regarded as a sojourn in hell. When the Ismailian has acknowledged his *imām* he rises to the regions of light, the luminous regions, to remain there for ever.⁷ The reality of this belief is shown by a passage in one of the Ismailian fragments that have come down to us: "A certain sage said to his child: 'O my son! seek to deliver thy soul by a single sojourn in

⁶ This account is based on Muḥammad ibn Khāvand Shāh, Mir Khvānd, "Le Jardin de la Pureté," trans. by Am. Jourdain, *Notices et Extraits des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Impériale* (Paris, 1813), ix., pp. 143 *et seq.*; E. M. Quatremère, "Notice historique sur les Ismaéliens," *Fundgruben des Orients* (Wien, 1814), iv., pp. 339 *et seq.*; Baron J. von Hammer-Purgstall, *The History of the Assassins* (London, 1835); C. Defrémy, "Nouvelles recherches sur les Ismaéliens ou Bathiniens de Syrie," *Journal Asiatique* (Paris, 1854, 1855), 5 ser., iii., pp. 373 *et seq.*, v., pp. 5 *et seq.*; Stan. Guyard, "Fragments relatifs à la doctrine des Ismaélis," *Notices et Extraits des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris, 1874), xxii., pp. 177 *et seq.*

⁷ S. Guyard, *op. cit.*, pp. 191, 332 *et seq.*, 391, 398.

the body and not by a second sojourn in a new body.''"⁸ The belief that this process of rebirth extends to animals was considered heretical,⁹ animals, indeed, not even being granted souls.¹⁰

The doctrine of divine incarnation appears to have taken a curious turn to-day. God, it seems, is held to be tabernacled in a virgin living on the edge of the Syrian desert, at Selemiyeh. "This girl is called the *ro'dhah*,¹¹ which may be translated a greensward or pleasaunce. As long as she remains a virgin she is regarded as sacred, and the Ismailians wear bits of her clothing or hair from her person in their turbans. But should she marry,—and she may do so honourably,¹²—search is made for a successor, who must be a girl born on a certain day in the year,¹³ and who should conform to certain characteristics regarding her height and the colour of her hair and eyes. At least two persons have surprised the Isma'iliyah at a service of adoration of the *ro'dhah*. One, a government official, who broke in forcibly, found the girl seated on a high chair dressed in a white robe, with a wreath of fresh flowers on her head. The worshippers were kneeling before her chanting sacred songs. According to the testimony of the other witness, a simple Syrian Christian, whom I questioned some ten years after his adventure, his observations were confined to the brief period between his accidental stumbling into a secret assembly and his rough ejection by one of the worshippers, who told him that any one else would have been promptly butchered! He happened to be on friendly terms with the prominent sheikhs. He remembered seeing a circle of some twenty or thirty initiates, seated on the floor, in an attitude of adoration of a girl of about sixteen years of age dressed in

⁸ S. Guyard, *op. cit.*, p. 397. ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 396. ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 362, 376.

¹¹ Gertrude Bell, *The Desert and the Sown* (London, 1907), p. 233, transliterated this word as *rōzah*.

¹² According to Gertrude Bell (*loc. cit.*) she cannot marry.

¹³ The day is specified by Gertrude Bell (*loc. cit.*) as the 27th of Rejab.

a black robe that entirely covered her person, with her hair hanging down on either side of her face which was left exposed. Some one held a book, but he was not sure whether it was the girl or her father, a prominent religious sheikh. . . . This girl has since been married and her place taken by another.”¹⁴ The writer of this account attempts to connect this ceremony with nature worship ; but in the present fragmentary state of our knowledge it is idle to venture on conjecture.

I said that there is difference of opinion as to the personality of the seventh and last *nāṭiq*. In the so-called Assassin¹⁵ branch of the Ismailians Rāshid ad-Dīn Sinān is considered to have occupied this position. This Rāshid came to Syria from Persia about A.D. 1160 and there established himself, claiming and being granted that degree of divinity.¹⁶ From an account of him written about A.D. 1335 by Abu Firās, it appears that a belief of the rebirth of human souls into the lower animals had by then become general among the Assassins. Abu Firās relates the miracles performed by Rāshid ; amongst these are several bearing on rebirth. Thus, one day a big serpent started up on the road along which Rāshid was travelling. His guards hurried to kill it, but Rāshid stopped them, saying, “ This serpent is so-and-so : his metamorphosis¹⁷ is his purgatory, for he was heavy with sin. Do not deliver him from his

¹⁴ F. J. Bliss, *The Religions of Modern Syria and Palestine* (New York, 1912), pp. 311-2.

¹⁵ It is now agreed that this name was not derived from the murderous proclivities of the sect, but from a lesser vice. The word derives from the Arabic ḥasshāshīn or ḥashīshiyā, hashish-drinkers. This etymology was first suggested by Silvestre de Sacy, *Mémoire sur la dynastie des Assassins et sur l'origine de leur nom* (Paris, 1809), and *Lettre . . . au rédacteur du Moniteur sur l'étymologie du nom des Assassins* (Paris, 1809).

¹⁶ See S. Guyard, “ Un Grand Maître des Assassins,” *Journal Asiatique* (Paris, 1877), 7 ser., ix., pp. 324 et seq.

¹⁷ J. Catafago, “ Lettre . . . à M. Mohl,” *Journal Asiatique* (Paris, 1848), 4 ser., xii., p. 492; no. 20, translates “ transmigration,” which is unquestionably the sense intended to be conveyed.

condition."¹⁸ Again, one day Rāshid saw a performing monkey. Turning to his entourage Rāshid gave one of them a coin, telling him to give it to the monkey. The animal took it, turned it about, looked at it for a long time, and suddenly died. "This monkey," said Rāshid in explanation, "was once a king, and this dinar was struck in his name. When he saw it God caused him to remember his past power and showed him his degradation, the degree of debasement and humiliation to which he had fallen. The violence of his sorrow killed him."¹⁹ Once more, it chanced one day that a butcher was about to kill a very young bull in Rāshid's presence. But the bull took the butcher's knife in his mouth and ran away, so that nobody could catch him. "Do not seek to kill him," said Rāshid, "he has already been seven times sacrificed on this spot."²⁰ We hear also of deceased persons re-appearing in the shape of a bird²¹ and of a horse.²² In one case, however, the story seems to refer to metamorphosis rather than to metempsychosis.²³

That Rāshid, who was born a Nusairi, should have thus emphasised the doctrine of rebirth among the Assassins is not strange, for the Nusairi themselves give considerable prominence to this belief. This sect, who live in the hills of Northern Syria, in the Jebel Ansariyeh, number to-day about 100,000 souls. Although they are not usually reckoned among the Moslem population, they are clearly related to the Shi'ites, in that they do not recognise the Sunnite successors of the Prophet. And they attribute divinity to 'Ali, the son of Mohammed's cousin and son-in-law Abu Tālib, who is regarded by the Shi'ites as the legitimate successor of the Prophet. Their separation from

¹⁸ S. Guyard, "Un Grand Maître des Assassins," p. 438, no. xx; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 361-2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 438-9, no. xxi.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 440, no. xxiii.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 437-8, no. xix.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 440-5, no. xxiv.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 443-5, no. xxvi.

Islām lies in their extravagant worship of 'Ali, whom they even substitute for God in the sacred formula, "There is no god but God," saying, "There is no god but 'Ali, son of Abu Tālib." The history of the Nusairi is known since the eleventh century A.D., and little change has taken place in their doctrines since then. There is no doubt that their religion codifies the aboriginal beliefs of their home, strongly modified by Shi'ite and Ismailian influences.

The sacred book of the Nusairi is the *Kitāb al-Majmū*, a brief document consisting of sixteen short sections.²⁴ From it, and from lesser sources, we learn that the Nusairi look upon rebirth as a terrible necessity, continued until the soul is purified. When initiating a new adept the *Imām* says to him,—“If you unveil this mystery, the earth will not suffer you to be buried in it, and on your return you will not re-enter a human envelope: no, when you die, you will enter the envelope of a degrading transformation whence there will be no deliverance for you, for ever and ever.”²⁵ The soul of one who is observant passes through only seven lives, otherwise he is condemned to journey through eighty incarnations. As has been seen, it is even possible for a soul to be obliged to enter an animal. Such is the fate of those who do not pray to 'Ali ibn Abu Tālib: they pass into camels, mules, donkeys, sheep. Nor are all human incarnations looked upon as equally fortunate: the worst fate is to be reborn into a Jew, a Sunnite, or a Christian. Finally, the purified soul takes its place among the stars.²⁶

²⁴ It has been published and translated by René Dussaud, *Histoire et religion des Nogairis* (Paris, 1900), pp. 161 *et seq.* Dussaud's book is the best, almost the only, authority on the Nusairis, and I here follow it, together with the Rev. Samuel Lyde, *The Asian Mystery* (London, 1860), pp. 110 *et seq.*; Edward E. Salisbury, “The Book of Sulaimān's First Ripe Fruit, disclosing the Mysteries of the Nusairian Religion,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (New Haven, 1866), viii., pp. 227 *et seq.*; Rev. Edward Sell, *The Cult of 'Ali* (London etc., 1910).

²⁵ René Dussaud, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

²⁶ Cf. C. Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und andern umliegenden Ländern* (Kopenhagen, Hamburg, 1774-1837), ii., pp. 440, 443.

Thus, a modern traveller spoke to an old Nusairi who was sitting one evening surrounded by his boys, saying,— “ Speak : where are the sons of your youth ? these are the children of your old age.” “ My son,” the old sheikh replied, looking up, “ is there ; nightly he smiles on me, and invites me to come.”²⁷

The modern Nusairi justify their belief in rebirth by asking how one can explain a man being born blind if this fate is not an expiation for sins committed in a former state.²⁸ They will also point to the fact that living animals have “ been seen with scars on their body corresponding to the wounds of which certain individuals have died in these places.”²⁹

The belief is illustrated by a Nusairi story reported by a Druse writer. The tale goes that a certain Nusairi owned a vineyard which he had worked for some time with his father, until the latter’s death. At grape-time a wolf installed himself in the vineyard. Each time that the cultivator came to the vine he found the wolf eating the grapes, and chased him away. This went on until, tired of doing so, the man decided to kill the wolf. He was preparing to use his weapon when the wolf said to him,— “ Oh, you so-and-so, are you going to kill your father because he takes a few grapes from the vine which he fructified all his life by his work ? ” The Nusairi, surprised to hear the wolf talk, cried out,—“ Who is my father ? ” The wolf replied,—“ I, for my soul has emigrated into this shape. This is my vineyard that you cultivated with me.” The Nusairi then remembered that his father, before his death, had hidden a reaping-hook in the vineyard, but he

²⁷ Hon. F. Walpole, *The Ansayrii* (London, 1851), iii., pp. 355-6 ; cf. Rev. John Wortabet, *Researches into the Religion of Syria* (London, 1860), pp. 347-9, 309.

²⁸ Rev. Samuel Lyde, *The Ansyreeh and Ismaeleeah* (London, 1853), pp. 198-9.

²⁹ An Oriental Student [A. A. Paton], *The Modern Syrians* (London, 1844), pp. 277-8.

had been unable to find it. "If you speak the truth," he cried to the wolf, "tell me where is the reaping-hook with which we were cutting the shoots of the vine." The wolf replied,—"Follow me," and went to the place where lay the reaping-hook. "Here it is," said he. The Nusairi took it, and allowed the wolf to eat the grapes as much as he wished.³⁰

The Nusairi consider women to have no souls; women are not initiated, neither do they share the transmigratory journeyings of the men. But there appears to be some divergence from this doctrine in one of the Nusairi sects or sub-sects. There are four of these, the Heidaris, the Shamālis, the Kalazis, and the Gheibis. The name of the first of these is derived from one of the tribes of 'Ali, the other three have tendencies, respectively, towards sun-worship, moon-worship, and air-worship. Apart from this they share the Nusairi doctrines.³¹ Bent reports that a group of Kalazis, settled at Tarsus, in Asia Minor, have included women in their system of reincarnations. He writes that it was said of a great man among them that he is one of those who "will at once become stars when they die, without going through any of those unpleasant transformations which are a common fact of their belief. With them metempsychosis partakes strongly of the ridiculous: bad men put on 'low envelopes,' or Kamees,³² in the next world; Mussulmans become jackals, and Jewish Rabbis apes; a man may be punished by becoming a woman, but a good woman may be rewarded in the next life

³⁰ René Dussaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-6. Dussaud (*op. cit.*, pp. 120 *et seq.*) tries to trace back the Nusairi doctrine of rebirth to Chaldaeo-Persian sources, but with little success.

³¹ Hardly anything definite is known of these four sects; for a recent account of one of them see Henri Lammens, "Une visite au Šaib suprême des Nosairis Haidaris," *Journal Asiatique* (Paris, 1915), 11 ser., v., pp. 139 *et seq.*

³² This appears to be a mistake; *kamis*, shirt, is the term usually applied to the physical body.

by becoming a man ; and many kindred ideas of this nature.”³³

As a footnote to the Nusairi doctrine, it is interesting to note, in view of Akbar’s adoption of transmigration as a part of his egocentric religion, that there were apparently some Nusairi at Fathpūr about the time that the new faith was being promulgated.³⁴

It remains to notice the Nusairi system of divine reincarnation. This system is extremely complex, and we possess only the slenderest materials for its understanding. Briefly, they hold that divinity has manifested itself in two cycles of seven incarnations, one cycle before the Fall and one since. In each cycle divinity has appeared in three ³⁵ simultaneous forms, as *ma’nā*, essential force or meaning (a conception strangely similar to that of the Melanesian *mana*), as *ism* or name, and, as *bab*, or door, together with each of these triune incarnations there successively appeared an adversary. The names of each of these seven incarnations of the groups of form are recorded, but the twenty-eight names seem to be of little significance.³⁶ The seven *ma’nās* since the Fall were Abel, Seth, Joseph, Joshua, Aṣaf (the vizier of Solomon), Peter, and finally, of course, ‘Ali. The corresponding *isms* were Adam, Noah, Jacob, Moses, Solomon, Jesus, and Mohammed. The names of the *babs* and adversaries are uncertain.³⁷

We come now to the sect of which we possess a much fuller documentation, the Druses. These now number

³³ J. Theodore Bent, “Report to the Committee [appointed for the purpose of investigating . . . the Nomad Tribes of Asia Minor and Northern Persia, etc.],” *Report of the Sixtieth Meeting of the British Association . . . 1890* (London, 1891), p. 544.

³⁴ Abu ’l-Fazl ibn Mubārak, ‘Allāmī, *The Akbarnāma* (Calcutta, 1897, etc.), iii., p. 397.

³⁵ Or, according to some accounts, in five ; see C. Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, ii., pp. 440 *et seq.*

³⁶ They are printed by René Dussaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-5.

³⁷ But see C. Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, ii., pp. 440 *et seq.*

about 150,000 persons, and occupy southern Lebanon, the western slopes of Hermon, Haurān, and the northern part of Hama. Their name is derived from Darazi, who lived contemporaneously with the Fatimite Caliph Hākim (A.D. 996-1020), and proclaimed that Caliph's divinity, although his character and actions are probably unrivalled for insane cruelty. Darazi, who was originally a missionary of the Ismailians, taught that the soul of 'Ali had entered into the ancestors of Hākim. These teachings were taken up by Hamza, the real founder of the Druses, and taken by him to Syria, where they date from A.H. 410.³⁸

Although we possess a good deal of information about the Druses, much of it, happily, from original documents, they still rank as a secret sect. The members of it do not reveal details of their beliefs and practices, and they are not merely permitted, but actually instructed, to assimilate themselves, outwardly at least, to those among whom they dwell or travel. A Druse among Jews becomes a Jew and among Christians a Christian. The difficulty of acquiring direct information about their religion from the Druses themselves can be judged from the statement of Lamartine, one of the very few strangers received by Lady Hester Stanhope, that even she had confessed that the Druse

³⁸ The chief authorities for the history and religion of the Druses are Silvestre de Sacy, *Exposé de la religion des Druses* (Paris, 1838), whom I mainly follow, and Philipp Wolff, *Die Drusen und ihre Vorläufer* (Leipzig, 1845), though this work is largely derived from that of Silvestre de Sacy. See also, in addition to the works cited below, An Oriental Student [A. A. Paton], *The Modern Syrians* (London, 1844), pp. 284 *et seq.*; George Washington Chasseaud, *The Druses of the Lebanon* (London, 1855), pp. 389 *et seq.*, (including a translation of the Druse religious code); Freiherr Max von Oppenheim, *Von Mittelmeer zum Persischen Golf* (Berlin, 1899-1900), i., pp. 134-6; C. F. Seybold, *Die Drusenschrift Kitāb Alnoqat Waldawāir* (Leipzig, 1902); Algernon Ward, "The Druses and their Religion," *The East and the West* (Westminster, 1910), viii., pp. 32 *et seq.*; Canon Edward Sell, *The Druses* (London etc., 1910); F. J. Bliss, *The Religions of Modern Syria and Palestine* (New York, 1912), pp. 308-311; George Samné, *La Syrie* (Paris, 1920), pp. 327-337.

religion was a mystery to her.³⁹ And quite recently Henry Bordeaux found that he had committed an indiscretion when he questioned the religious head of the Druses as to his belief in rebirth. Although he was accompanied by a French military official his question remained unanswered.⁴⁰ The Druses even have formulas to enable them to recognise each other among strangers. In a Druse catechism dating from A.D. 1012, in answer to the question how a brother is to be distinguished, the answer is given,—“ By saying—Man! do they grow the Thlilij [myrobalan tree] in your country? If his answer be, Yes, it is planted in the hearts of the believers, he is therefore one of us. Then we are to present to him two earthen water-bottles, the one full and the other empty. If he pours the water from the full one into the empty bottle then he is certainly one of us, because by this he acknowledges the transmigration of souls, as the water is poured out from one vessel into another.”⁴¹

Amid this secrecy, the belief of the Druses in rebirth is, as one writer vividly puts it, “ very strong and cordial ”; and he goes on to say that “ hence it is almost the only doctrine in their creed which they have occasionally avowed openly and attempted to defend.”⁴² The strength of the belief is shown by the fact that in the form of the Druse oath, the swearer, amongst many other things, declares that if the oath is false he will be a “ denier of the appearance of the Highest, who has appeared ten times in the form of mankind, and also a denier of the transmigration and transfer of the spirits. . . . ”⁴³ This explains the fact that as early

³⁹ M. L. A. Lamartine de Prat, *Souvenirs, impressions, pensées et pay-sages, pendant un Voyage en Orient* (Paris, 1835), ii. p. 358.

⁴⁰ Henry Bordeaux, *Dans la Montagne des Druses* (Paris, 1926), pp. 109-10.

⁴¹ “ A Catechism of the Druse Religion,” *Quarterly Statement for 1886 [of the] Palestine Exploration Fund* (London, 1886), p. 41; cf. A. C. Inchbold, *Under the Syrian Sun* (London, 1906), i., p. 73.

⁴² Rev. John Wortabet, *Researches into the Religions of Syria* (London, 1860), p. 307.

⁴³ “ A Catechism of the Druse Religion,” p. 35.

as the twelfth century Benjamin of Tudela, during a brief stay, acquired some knowledge of the Druse doctrine of rebirth.⁴⁴

To-day the doctrine is held as strongly as ever, and with little change. A Druse boy, educated at a mission school, stopped his ears with his fingers on hearing the sudden discharge of a gun, and displayed symptoms of alarm. On being questioned by his master why he was afraid, he naively replied,—“I was born murdered,” meaning, we are told, “that the soul of a murdered man had passed into his body at the moment of his birth.”⁴⁵ Again, a recent traveller tells us that at the moment of his mother’s death, a calf was born in the herd of a Druse, who firmly believed that the soul of his mother had gone to dwell in that calf.⁴⁶ Following the dreadful massacres of the Christians by Druses in 1860 a French punitive expedition was sent out. In the house of a fugitive Druse sheikh was found a document, dated 1846, in which the Druses were instigated to rise. The following passage occurs in it:—“The soul of a Druse who dies in fighting the Christians will go to inhabit a star, or the body of a hero, or that of a noble animal, such as a lion or a gazelle. The soul of a Druse put to death for having betrayed our secrets, for having refused obedience to his chiefs or for having retreated in battle, will go to inhabit the body of a pig or that of a donkey.”⁴⁷

A modern Druse, arguing in favour of his belief in rebirth, apart from the authority of the sacred writings, will point out that many are doomed to a life of suffering and

⁴⁴ *The Itinerary*, ed. M. N. Adler (London, 1907), p. 18 (p. 29 of Asher’s text). Rabbi Solomon L. Rapaport reads Nusairi for the sect of which Benjamin here speaks (*The Itinerary*, ed. A. A. Asher (London, Berlin, 1840-1841), ii., pp. 71-2, no. 142); but, as Asher points out (*op. cit.*, ii., pp. 72-3, no. 142a), the Druses are clearly intended.

⁴⁵ Colonel [Charles Henry] Churchill, *Mount Lebanon* (London, 1853), ii., p. 171 n.

⁴⁶ William Ewing, *Arab and Druze at Home* (London, 1907), p. 88.

⁴⁷ Baptiste Poujoulat, *La Vérité sur la Syrie* (Paris, 1861), p. 483.

misery, while others enjoy an opposite condition. Now, this cannot be consistent with the goodness and justice of God unless one supposes that their moral actions during their previous lives were such as to necessitate the present dealings of God with them. To a Christian the Druse will cite two passages from the New Testament: that where Jesus says that John the Baptist was Elijah, and the inquiry of the disciples, with regard to the man who had been born blind, whether *he* had sinned or his parents, for if *he* had sinned it must have been while he was in a previous body.⁴⁸ Finally, the Druses affirm that instances are not wanting where a person remembers a past life, and his statements are tested and found to be true. They quote specific cases. Here is one such case: a child, five years old, in Jebel el-'Ala, "complained of the life of poverty which his parents led, and alleged that he had been a rich man of Damascus; that on his death he was born again among his present friends; and desired to be carried to that city. He was taken there by his relatives, and on the way astonished them by his correct knowledge of the names of the different places which they passed. On reaching the city he led the way through the various streets to a house which he said had been his own. He knocked, and called the woman of the house by her name, and on being admitted told her that he had been her husband, and asked after the welfare of the several children, relatives, and acquaintances whom he had left. The Druses of the place soon met to inquire into the truth of the matter. The child gave them a full account of his past life among them, of the names of his acquaintances, the property which he had possessed, and the debts which he had left. All was found to be strictly true, except a small sum which he said a certain weaver owed him. The man was called, and, the claim being mentioned to him, he acknowledged it, pleading his poverty for not having paid

⁴⁸ Rev. John Wortabet, *Researches into the Religions of Syria* (London, 1860), p. 308.

it to the children of the deceased. The child then asked the woman who had been his wife whether she had found a sum of money which he had hid in the cellar; and, on her replying in the negative, he went directly to the place, dug up the treasure, and counted it before them. The money was found to be exactly of the amount and kind of specie which he had specified. His wife and children, who had become considerably older than himself, then gave him some money, and he returned with his new friends to his mountain home.”⁴⁹

From the details of the Druse belief in rebirth that have now incidentally emerged, it will be clear that the Druse doctrine also may be said to fall into two parts, divine rebirth and human rebirth. Of the system of divine rebirth our knowledge is still very restricted, notwithstanding the expository labours of Silvestre de Sacy. Hākim is held to have been the tenth and last incarnation of divinity,⁵⁰ and is expected to return at some future death; this future re-appearance seems to be expected to partake of the nature of a resurrection rather than of a further reincarnation. Further, in Druse cosmogony the world has lasted 343 million years; this period is divided into seventy cycles, each of which has been ruled over by successively incarnating groups of seven speakers, seven trustees, and seven sovereigns.

The individual, according to Druse philosophy, is made up of soul, spirit, and body, the last being usually referred to as *kamis*, shirt, to indicate its transitory and unessential nature. The union of these three elements forms a person. The soul passes successively into various bodies, thus forming a series of otherwise independent persons. The number of souls is limited and fixed, though the number is unknown. It is not clear whether every soul is held to be continuously

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 308-9 *n.*

⁵⁰ Cp. Gregory M. Wortabet, *Syria and the Syrians* (London, 1856), i. p. 102.

in incarnation. If the Druses believe that the soul of a dead person passes at once into the envelope of a new-born infant, as has been stated,⁵¹ this would offer no difficulties to the believers, for they are convinced that Druses form the population of several parts of the world, including China. The degree of happiness, the station in life, and so on, of the individual in each rebirth is governed by his conduct and actions in previous lives.⁵² We have seen that almost from the earliest times animals have been included in the scheme of rebirths, but it is quite clear that this is contrary to the teaching of Hamza himself.⁵³

Finally, those souls who have reached a sufficient stage of purification or merit are reborn into Chinese Druses.⁵⁴ It is not clear whether this can occur before the return of Hākim; but at any rate when he does so return all faithful Druses will follow him in that triumphal march from China during which he is to conquer the whole world and make the Druse religion to prevail over all others.

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⁵¹ C. Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, ii. p. 438.

⁵² We are informed that at "Biskinta, on the Lebanon, is the tomb of a Druze who, tradition says, was buried alive to obtain merit in the next stage of his existence. . . . Greek Orthodox Christians in the village—and they only—cast stones on this grave with muttered curses as they pass." (Frederick Sessions, "Some Syrian Folklore Notes gathered on Mount Lebanon," *Folk-Lore*, ix. (1898), p. 15). But such a practice would be contrary to the spirit of the Druse writings, and verification of this statement is desirable.

⁵³ See Silvestre de Sacy, *Exposé de la religion des Druses*, ii., pp. 432 *et seq.*

⁵⁴ Cp. Rev. James Connor, *Visit . . . in 1819 and 1820, to Candia, Rhodes, Cyprus, and various parts of Syria and Palestine*, in Rev. William Jowett, *Christian Researches in the Mediterranean*³ (London, 1824), p. 445; Joseph Jabrail [or Jibrail], in *Quarterly Statement for 1889 [of the] Palestine Exploration Fund* (London, 1889), p. 121; E. S. Stevens, *Cedars, Saints and Sinners in Syria* (London [1926]), p. 283.